

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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FM AMCONSUL BELIZE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3737

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR BH

SUBJECT: POLITICAL SITUATION IN BELIZE

1. PURPOSE OF THIS CABLE IS TO PROVIDE BASIC INFORMATION ON POLITICAL SITUATION HERE WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO OCTOBER 30 ELECTIONS.

2. TIMING. ELECTIONS MANDATORY AT LEAST EVERY FIVE YEARS. PREMIER PRICE COULD HAVE WAITED ANOTHER MONTH BUT PROBABLY CONCLUDED THAT WAITING UNTIL LAST MOMENT WOULD BE INTERPRETED BY OPPONENTS AS RELUCTANCE TO SUBMIT HIS GOVERNMENT'S RECORD TO THE VOTERS. ACTUALLY, CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN UNDERWAY UNOFFICIALLY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, ESPECIALLY BY OPPOSITION. CANDIDATES IN NEARLY ALL ELECTORAL DIVISIONS HAVE BEEN SELECTED BY PARTIES; NOMINATIONS TO BE FORMALIZED ABOUT OCTOBER 12.

3. STAKES. MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE ELECTED FROM ALL EIGHTEEN OF THE COUNTRY'S ELECTORAL DIVISIONS. OF THESE, EIGHT ARE IN BELIZE CITY, TWO EACH ARE FROM THE DISTRICTS OF TOLEDO, CAYO, STANN CREEK, COROZAL AND ORANGE WALK. IN 1969 PRICE'S PARTY WON SEVENTEEN SEATS. (PRICE HAS SINCE LOST ONE OF THESE BY THE DEFECTION OF ONE OF HIS PARTY'S REPRESENTATIVES TO A NEWLY-FORMED

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SPLINTER GROUP.)

4. POLITICAL PARTIES. PRINCIPAL ANTAGONISTS ARE THE PEOPLES UNITED PARTY (PUP - PRICE'S PARTY) VERSUS A LOOSE COALITION KNOWN AS THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC PARTY (UDP) COMPRISING THE NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE PARTY (NIP - LED BY PHILIP GOLDSON), THE PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (PDM - A NIP SPLINTER GROUP LED BY DEAN LINDO) AND THE LIBERAL PARTY (LIBERAL IN THE LAISSEZ-FAIRE SENSE). ALSO IN THE PICTURE IS THE COROZAL UNITED FRONT (CUF - HEADED BY REPRESENTATIVE SANTIAGO RICALDE, WHO WAS ELECTED IN 1969 AS A PUP CANDIDATE BUT WHO BROKE AWAY IN 1973 TO FORM THE CUF, CHARGING GOB NEGLECT OF THE NORTHERN DISTRICTS). ALTHOUGH NOT FORMALLY ALLIED WITH THE UDP COALITION, THE TWO ARE ON AMICABLE TERMS. THERE IS ALSO A SMALL BLACK POWER ORGANIZATION IN BELIZE, THE UNITED BLACK ASSOCIATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (UBAD - LED BY EVAN X. HYDE). ONLY HYDE APPEARS TO BE A SERIOUS CANDIDATE.

5. PARTY COMPOSITION AND ORIENTATION. THE PUP IS A RELATIVELY BROADLY BASED PARTY WHOSE MAIN STRENGTH IS IN THE LOWER INCOME GROUPS, BOTH URBAN AND RURAL; IT FAVORS A BROAD RANGE OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS AND LAND REFORM, AND A STRONG ROLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE COUNTRY. THE UDP'S STRENGTH IS LARGELY DERIVED FROM MERCHANTS, BUSINESSMEN, SELF-EMPLOYED MIDDLE-CLASS VOTERS, SOME OF THE MORE PROSPEROUS FARMERS AND MOST OF THE CIVIL SERVANTS. THE CUF IS A REGIONAL PARTY WHICH REPRESENTS THE SPANISH-SPEAKING MEXICAN-ORIENTED ELEMENT IN THE NORTH AND INCLUDES THE PROSPEROUS CANE FARMERS AND FISHERMEN IN THE COROZAL DISTRICT.

6. ISSUES. THE PUP WILL CLAIM ACHIEVEMENTS IN ITS SOCIAL PROGRAMS, IN SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND IN OTHER PUBLIC WORKS. PUP CANDIDATES CAN BE EXPECTED TO CHARACTERIZE THE ALIEN LAND-HOLDING ACT AS PROGRESSIVE LAND REFORM LEGISLATION AND THE GOVERNMENT'S RESTRICTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD FOREIGN INVESTMENT AS DEVELOPING BELIZEAN INDUSTRY FOR BELIZEANS. PRICE WILL EXTOLL BELIZEAN ACCESSION TO CARICOM AND HIS CONTINUING EFFORTS TOWARD INDEPENDENCE. HE WILL ALSO POINT WITH PRIDE AT HIS GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN PREPARING FOR AND RECOVERING FROM HURRICANES CARMEN AND FIFI. HIS OPPONENTS WILL EMPHASIZE INFLATION, CORRUPTION, MINISTERIAL INCOMPETENCE, INADEQUATE PUBLIC SERVICE (POOR ROADS, INADEQUATE HARBORS), EXCESSIVE FOREIGN BORROWING, POLITICIZATION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND FAILURES IN THE GOB LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AGRICULTURAL POLICY. AS FOR RELATIONS WITH GUATEMALA, UDP WILL REITERATE PREVIOUSLY AIRED CHARGE THAT PRICE IS A POTENTIAL TRAITOR WHO IS SECRETLY PLACNING TO MAKE A SUDDEN BID FOR INDEPENDENCE IN ORDER TO PROVIDE GUATEMALA WITH PRETEXT FOR TAKING OVER BELIZE BY MILITARY FORCE.

7. ELECTORAL CONTESTS OF SPECIAL INTEREST. ASSAD SHOMAN, AN AVOWED MARXIST, WHO HAS BEEN PRICE'S SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR THE PAST TWO

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YEARS, AND WHO IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN THE CHIEF ARCHITECT OF PRICE'S DOMESTIC POLICIES, IS THE PUP CANDIDATE FROM ONE OF THE CAYO DIVISIONS WHERE HE FACES A STRONG UDP OPPONENT. IF SHOMAN WINS, IT WILL BE READ AS AN IMPORTANT ENDORSEMENT OF LEFTWARD TREND IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES OF PRICE'S GOVERNMENT. SHOMAN WOULD DOUBTLESS GET A KEY CABINET POST. TWO OTHER PUP CANDIDATES (COURTENAY AND MUSA) WHO ARE IDENTIFIED WITH PUP'S LEFT WING ARE FACING STRONG UDP OPPONENTS, AND, AS IN THE CASE OF SHOMAN, HOW THEY FARE WILL HAVE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE GOB'S FUTURE POLITICAL ORIENTATION.

8. CONDUCT OF CAMPAIGN. POLLING PROCEDURES ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN HONEST IN PREVIOUS ELECTIONS, AND NO RIGGING IS ANTICIPATED. HOWEVER, PRICE ADHERES TO GAULLIST VIEW THAT GOVERNMENT-OWNED INFORMATION MEDIA, (IN THIS CASE RADIO BELIZE, THE ONLY RADIO STATION IN THE COUNTRY) BELONGS TO PARTY IN POWER. THE USE OF RADIO BELIZE FOR PUP PROPAGANDA, PLUS PRIVILEGED ACCESS TO OTHER GOVERNMENT RESOURCES GIVES THE GOVERNMENT PARTY A TREMENDOUS ADVANTAGE. THIS IS PARTIALLY OFFSET BY FUNDS FROM BELIZEANS IN THE U.S. COLLECTED FOR THE UDP BY THE BELIZEAN OVERSEAS FREEDOM COMMITTEE IN NEW YORK UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF REVEREND GERALD FAIRWEATHER WHO HAS RECENTLY ARRIVED IN BELIZE. PREMIER PRICE HAS IN THE PAST

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EXPRESSED THE SUSPICION THAT FAIRWEATHER IS A CIA AGENT, AND WE MAY HEAR THIS ALLEGATION DURING THE CAMPAIGN. OTHERWISE, CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND RHETORIC CAN BE EXPECTED TO ADHERE TO LOWEST IMAGINABLE STANDARDS.

9. PROSPECTS. IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED HERE THAT THE PUP WILL LOSE ANYWHERE FROM TWO TO SIX SEATS. FAILURE OF PRICE TO ATTAIN A MAJORITY SEEMS UNLIKELY, BUT CANNOT BE RULED OUT AT THIS STAGE. IF UDP COALITION WERE TO ATTAIN A MAJORITY IT WOULD BE A THIN ONE, AND IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT IT WOULD BE SUFFICIENTLY COHESIVE TO PROVIDE BELIZE WITH EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT.

10. EFFECT OF CAMPAIGN ON DISPUTE WITH GUATEMALA. THERE WILL PROBABLY BE RASH, INFLAMMATORY AND IRRESPONSIBLE UTTERANCES FROM ALL SIDES ON SUBJECT OF BELIZEAN INDEPENDENCE DURING THE COURSE OF THE CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, I THINK PRICE REALIZES THAT ANY SURPRISE MOVE TOWARD INDEPENDENCE DURING CAMPAIGN WOULD PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF OPPOSITION BY RAISING SPECTRE OF ARMED GUATEMALAN INTERVENTION, WITH UNPREDICTABLE BUT PROBABLY UNDESIRABLE CONSEQUENCES FOR HIM. GAWF

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